



Sunday, November 28, 2021

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Luke 12:28-34

The Advent of HOPE

INTRODUCTION:

It all started when the disciples were sitting with Jesus in the holy Temple. Some passersby were overheard admiring the architectural magnificence and structural integrity of the Temple. Jesus then tells them, "There will not be one stone of the Temple left sitting upon another. It will all be broken down."

The disciples must have been quite surprised by this doomsday response, so they asked, "When? When will these things be, and what will be the sign when it's about to happen?" Jesus then goes on for 20 verses, painting a vivid picture of a world gone mad, plagued with violence, wars, famines, and powerful natural disasters. He says that followers of Jesus, in particular, will be hated, persecuted, and even put on trial for their faith. It is a miserable forewarning.

And only then, Jesus says, will God intervene.

Hear this prophetic teaching from Jesus:

SCRIPTURE:

There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars, and on the earth distress among nations confused by the roaring of the sea and the waves. People will faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then they will see 'the Son of Man coming in a cloud' with power and great glory. Now when these things begin to take place, stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near."

Then he told them a parable: "Look at the fig tree and all the trees; as soon as they sprout leaves you can see for yourselves and know that summer is already near. So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near. Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all things have taken place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

"Be on guard so that your hearts are not weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of this life, and that day does not catch you unexpectedly, like a trap. For it will come upon all who live on the face of the whole earth. Be alert at all times, praying that you may have the strength to escape all these things that will take place, and to stand before the Son of Man."

SERMON:

Today's Gospel reading for this first Sunday of Advent, which also marks the first Sunday of our liturgical year is frankly, kind of surprising. You see, the Christian year does NOT begin in celebration, Advent begins in the shadows of despair, war, sorrow, and hate. This story opens to find us wandering blindly in the cold darkness of uncertainty. So, let us pray to be able to see in the dark.

Holy and wonderful God, blessed be Your name forever and ever. Oil the hinges on the doors of our hearts this morning so that it might swing open wide to receive Your word. I ask you to bless the words of my mouth and the meditation of all our open hearts, our God our Rock and our Redeemer. - AMEN

*Guiding God,
without the presence of your Holy Spirit,
we are hopelessly lost on this Advent journey.
Come to us in this place
as we gather to hear your Word.
Open our hearts to receive your Word
Open our minds to understand it.
May the words of my mouth and the meditation of all our hearts be pleasing
and acceptable to you, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.*

Even as our sanctuary is decorated and all over people are adorning trees with lights and decoration This is NOT really where ADVENT begins. Instead of Angels appearing to say, "*Do not be afraid*", or hopeful ancient prophecies of God's comfort and renewed divine presence, we read about the *end of time* and God's final judgment on the earth! Jesus describes the total collapse of the present world order and the establishment of God's realm.

You might find this odd, but I think it's great that our story of God begins with Jesus' warning of ominous chaos and destruction. I like it because we begin in a place that we are all quite familiar with. We can debate the existence of God all day long and never find agreement but no one can argue against the very real existence of evil.

Much of what Jesus is talking about in this Scripture reads as if it has been ripped from today's news cycle, or pulled off a twitter feed or shared on your

Facebook post. There *is* great fear among the nations, the sea and waves *are* ravaging the coastline. Many of us *are* living in *dread*, as Jesus said, “waiting for the things which are coming to the earth.” Things such as climate change and global warming, wild fires, *earthquakes* hurricanes and volcano eruptions. Mass shootings and terrorism invade even our sacred spaces, and an invisible, lethal pandemic refuses to be beaten. It’s no wonder we are left so disoriented, even the sun and moon and stars look out of whack. So many of us live in fear of what is coming next. I know some people go on self-imposed news black-outs just to preserve their sanity.

BUT, today, we begin a journey toward the light by admitting that our world, our culture, our society and even our own lives are not as they should be. We live in a broken world in need of healing. Yet, imbedded in this apocalyptic sermon we discover precisely where the advent of hope is kindled.

I think many of us think of the apocalypse like an epic studio picture starring Paul Rudd and Lucy Liu, scored by John Williams... opening Christmas Day! Who knows how that movie will end, but in the Bible, apocalypse literature always ends with Divine rescue – and I don’t mean *the marvel universe where super-heroes violently crush the evil villains* to save the day... until next time...? This is God’s rescue and the dawn of an entirely new era of justice and redemption. The Greek word for apocalyptic actually means “uncovering” or “revealing”. God pulls aside the mystical veil for a moment to reveal past what we already know is there and give us insight to the final scene that is yet to come. This is NOT a *Spoiler alert!* This is how we find our HOPE and keep moving ahead in FAITH. We get a glimpse of what has already been deployed against the forces of *evil* and *disorder*.

Just at the moment when all seems lost and the evil empire appears to have the upper hand, God will swoop in, like Hans Solo in the final scene, evil will be annihilated and all those under the boot of oppression will be liberated by a God that is only good. It’s like my professor of Hebrew Scripture, Greg Mobley said,

“Love will eventually win out, but it will be in triple overtime at the buzzer.”

Jesus said, at the point when you see all these things taking place and evil, hatred and terror appear to have the upper hand, then...

*will the Son of man come in a cloud,
with power and great glory.*

*So, when these things come about,
let your heads be lifted up,
because your salvation is near.*

What God reveals to us and wants us to know is that even now, God is on the MOVE. The dominant powers of today are not the ULTIMATE POWERS. Empires will fall, tyrants will be toppled, hatred will be vanquished, conflicts will resolve, refugees will find a home. Pandemics & every variant will fade away. GOD will bring healing and wholeness to our world!

The work is not yet done. We must admit that. We live in the tension of what we see all around us and what our faith proclaims, yet we are compelled to continue on, to honor God through service and mission.

Knowing this ultimate truth, that God is on the move, is how we can begin to see in the dark. The advent of hope gives us night vision to see through to a brighter day, and we are awakened to a deeper truth, alert, watching and waiting in heightened anticipation of the inevitable coming of our victorious God of grace. Advent proclaims the GOOD NEWS OF THE GOSPEL – Our God is on the move! Even now, let our heads be lifted up, salvation is near. Even now, let us light candles of defiance against the darkness of despair, sorrow, grief and hate. Even now, let this Advent hope guide us in the daily practice of choosing what is good and just for all people.

This is a faith that dares, even now, to light candles of hope, peace, joy and love, against hate and hopelessness. In solidarity and unity, we stand.

We begin the Christian year in darkness, but tell the story of God's promised liberation over the bondage of darkness and death. To participate in this Advent Season is to claim your hope in the advent of a new day and participate in the co-creation of that day that is surely coming.

People of God,
happy new year,
the kingdom of God is a hand.

AMEN